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University of Montana anthropology class discovers evidence of ancient man

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NEWS

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UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA ANTHROPOLOGY CLASS DISCOVERS EVIDENCE OF ANCIENT MAN

by Carl Gidlund
UM Information Services

Montanans are standing on important missing pieces of history.

Philip Hobler, an anthropology instructor at the University of Montana, believes that members of his archeological survey class have unearthed the earliest intact evidence of man's occupation of Western Montana.

Spear heads, pieces of bi-facial stone knives and stone chips dug up by class members at a site near Garrison may be 6,000 to 8,000 years old, according to Hobler.

Hobler said three projectile points, which were chipped from the flint-like rock chert, were found at a depth of 18 inches. They are similiar, he explained, to others found in the west that were constructed between 6,000 B.C. and 4,000 B.C.

Hobler points out that, since the spear tips were found near the surface and stone chips have been found down to the 6-foot base of the current excavation, humans may have visited the site much earlier. "It is possible," he said, "that artifacts below the level of 18 inches may be as old as some implements found in the MacHaffie site near Helena."

It has been estimated that material from the Helean excavation may date to 8,000 B.C.

The 12 members of Hobler's class unearthed the artifacts during weekend "digs" through Fall Quarter and the first weeks of Spring Quarter at UM.

The projectile points have been sent to artifact expert H.M. Wormington at the Denver Museum of Natural History for additional typological analysis.

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Hobler also said the University plans to send soil samples from the site to Washington State University where they may be dated by the carbon-dating process.

Dr. Charles N. Miller, an associate professor of botany at UM, has conducted preliminary tests on fossilized pollen found in the soil at the site. This type of analysis, Hobler explained, will provide valuable information about the plant types, hence the climate, at the time ancient man occupied the site.

Although he declines to describe the exact location of the site until excavations are completed, Hobler describes it as a bank of soil that has been cut through by a stream. From the amount of silt deposited, he surmises that at one time a pond occupied the site and from the artifacts, he assumes that the men that occupied the pond-side camp probably were hunters.

Hobler said the location has been known to graduate students in anthropology for several years. Permission to excavate was obtained from the land owner last September. Class members receive three credits a quarter for participation in the digging and preparation of a report on their findings.

Hobler, who holds degrees from the Universities of New Mexico and Arizona, is a specialist on archeology of the American Southwest and Africa. Prior to accepting his UM appointment in 1965, he spent two years in the Sahara and Nile River Valley of Egypt on prehistoric archeological expeditions. He also was a member of a salvage archeology team at the site of the Glan Canyon Dam in Arizona that was attempting to recover Indian artifacts before water flooded the site.